

2010 BIKE TRIP

MORE ADVENTURES OF JANE AND STEVE

BY STEVE LAWS

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Jane's travel blog

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Jane's music page

In March 2011 we attended the Ulysses AGM in Albany, Western Australia. Not too far for us, only 450 kilometres down the road. We enjoyed the event, especially test riding several bikes. For a while we had been thinking of swapping our trusty Japanese cruisers for some dual purpose bikes. The AGM allowed us to try several options but confirmed our decision to stick with our current bikes for the upcoming trip. Jane on her Yamaha Vstar 650 and me on my 1500 Kawasaki Vulcan.

We returned home for about a month, to finalise everything before heading off on a four month journey. Oh, nearly forgot, during this month we purchased a trailer sailer and rejoined the local sailing club. We managed to organised storage for the new yacht at the club even before our membership was approved. Luckily, the bloke making all the decisions on whether to allow the boat to stay at the club was a fellow rider. Sometimes we wonder why we put so much pressure on ourselves.

After a farewell dinner at a friend's house we finally got away on 20th April 2010. Our plan was to "go slow", taking plenty of time to see the sites along the way. Hopefully, follow the Murray River, then head north keeping inland a bit to savour the roads along the Great Dividing Range. We planned on trying to get as far north as possible, then back west via Mount Isa, Alice Springs and Ayers Rock. First we had to cross the paddock, again.

With our "go slow" plan in action we took a few back roads from home in Rockingham until we reached Merredin. Then you have to go along the



Grand Parade, Ulysses AGM, Albany

highway if you want to head east on the black stuff. While refuelling, the garage attendant informed us that there had been an earthquake in Kalgoorlie. She had no details but said very little traffic had come west since. This was our first piece of misinformation for the trip. There had been an earthquake, luckily no injuries and nowhere near the highway. We were thinking of our previous trip, when we took the southern route via Esperance at the same time as the Great Eastern Highway was closed due to fire.

The first night was spent at Southern Cross. The second day was uneventful and the night spent at Balladonia. We had never stayed here before as we normally do more kilometres per day. So, second day and we are still sticking to our "go slow" plan. There were a couple of interesting truckies at Balladonia. First one was coming west and spent a while cleaning his truck, covered in locusts, a sign of things to come. He gave us some special stuff to remove them, but later, we found that it also

removes all polish. Not the stuff for our shiny cruisers. The other truckie was eastward bound in a brand new truck, with great Aprilla graphics. The truck contained seven brand new bikes and was heading off to start a tour doing test rides. We couldn't convince the driver to unload and give us a go!



Eucla - WA/SA Border

Next day we made it to the border. Once again, we had never stayed at Eucla and we wanted to try the restaurant overlooking the Great Australian Bight, which has fresh fish caught by the local fisherman. It was pretty good, especially considering how far we were from civilisation. Next

morning it was raining. On the last trip across this part of the world we had 47 degrees, this time rain. Most people complain about the wind but so far we have been lucky on that score.

Next night was Ceduna, with its mouse plague. We saw plenty of mice around the camp ground and the town. The next morning while packing up the tent we found a couple of the little mongrels had started building a nest under the tent. We couldn't get out of there fast enough.



Give Way to Emus

On the road toward the Flinders Ranges

Nice gentle ride to Port Augusta, where we had decided to stay for a couple of nights. We had always just stayed one night here in the past. We visited the botanical gardens and the sights of the town. We quite like the place.

Next stop was the Wilpena Pound in Finders Range. Our first taste of locusts! Apparently they are ok on pizza, but we declined the offer! We loved the Flinders and on this occasion it would have been nice to have the dual sport bikes that we had been thinking off. The road from Wilpena through the national park to Blinman is now sealed and it is a terrific road. Fantastic scenery, lots of elevation changes and loads of wide open curves. One of the all time best roads we have ridden. Just watch out for some of the creek crossing, they can have steep entrances and exits and may have wash-outs after rain.

Next stop after the Finders was Peterborough, so we could visit the bike museum established in an old church. What a great place to create a bike museum! Wonder what they ride in heaven? The museum had a nice collection of small capacity European bikes. We just wish we had known that you could stay at the museum in the attached Bed and Breakfast. The room looked great and the owners were terrific. We will have to wait till next time.



Peterborough Motorcycle Museum

We joined the Murray River at Morgan and then followed it eastwards. On our last trip to the east coast in 2008 we had wanted to come home along

the Murray, but it was still very hot and we decided to follow the Victorian coast to stay cooler. We have always been interested in boats, so we really enjoyed viewing the river traffic, visiting locks and meeting some of the characters that seem to inhabit all such rivers.



P.S. Alexander Arbuthnot

Of course, Echuca, with its fabulous dockside museum and collection of paddle steamers was a highlight. I spent ages chatting to the skipper of the paddle steamer, Alexander Arbuthnot, during our river cruise. The skipper was explaining how the old timers turn the paddle steamers by running the bow onto the bank, allowing the current to turn the boat and then just gently reversing off. So he gave it a go and of course got well and truly stuck! This occurred right in front of the wharf where all the other skippers gave our skipper heaps. We had never heard so many steam horns blowing at one time. As we departed the skipper placed his hand out for extra money, since he had extended the

cruise by half an hour and provided much merriment and entertainment for all on board. He didn't collect much!

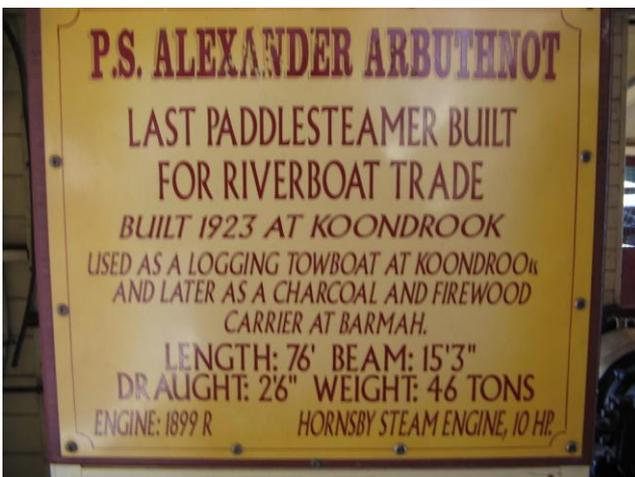
We had intended to keep heading east to Lake Hume and the Murray River head waters. It was now well into May and the weather got the best of us. Snow was forecast to 1100 metres and we were heading up to about 900 metres. Too cold for us Sandgropers, we are used to more pleasant weather. Still, you also need to leave a little in reserve for trips yet to come.

So we picked some nice back roads, up through Gundagai and finally arrived at Bathurst. We had always wanted to visit Bathurst, hopefully for race weekend, but this was the first time we had made it to the historic town. We visited the motor racing museum and of course did a couple of laps of the track. It must be the smoothest road in NSW, if not the whole of Australia.



Mount Panorama Racetrack, Bathurst

The next day we woke to frost all over the bikes and tent. Jane splashed some water while doing the breakfast dishes and this quickly froze on the table. We checked the forecast and it was for sub zero minimums for all the towns to the north. Surely it should get warmer going north, does at home, but then again we don't have any elevation. It's too cold for us, so we headed for the coast along the famous bike road "The Bells Line of Road".



The sign says it all



Steve on the Southern Swan



Jane on the Southern Swan

As mentioned, sailing is another pastime we indulge in, so we were delighted to be dockside when around the world alone, female sailor Jessica Watson arrived. As luck would have it we managed to organise a ride on the old square rigger, Southern Swan, to welcome her home. Unfortunately Jessica was running late and we had to return to base due to the owners prior commitments. We had just arrived back when the roar went up as Jessica crossed the finish line at Sydney Heads. We found a good viewing position as she docked at the Opera House. What made this very special for us was that we had owned a yacht of the same design (Sparkman and Stephens 34) for fifteen years. Jane had also sung on the dock as part of David Dick's welcome home ceremony many years before. David was also a solo, teenage world circumnavigator who completed his voyage on [Seafight](#), another yacht of the same design.



Jessica is in there somewhere, you just need to look hard!

After Sydney we took another famous bike route, this time the Putty Road. We stayed the night in Singleton and celebrated Jane's birthday in a great little Indian restaurant in an old house run by a delightful husband and wife. Well recommended.

It was still too cold for us inland so we headed back to the coast and visited some of our old sailing haunts of Port Macquarie, Coffs Harbour and Byron Bay. These places made great bases for day rides into the hills. What great bike roads they have in northern NSW. We really enjoyed the caravan park centrally located in the town of Byron Bay. We thought it would be too trendy and full of movie stars, but found some great little eating houses down back allies, that were relatively inexpensive. The walk around the cape was enjoyable, although



On the road to Dorrigo

we hadn't planned such a long walk and for once we were not carrying any water. We now have a full set of photos to prove we have visited the easternmost, northernmost, westernmost and southernmost points of mainland Australia!



Cape Byron

From Byron Bay we decided it was now warm enough to head inland. We think they were great bikes roads but the consistent drizzle made them hard to appreciate. We went out through Kyogle (does anyone else think it sounds like an internet search engine?) then took yet another famous bike road, "The Lions Road". I had been looking forward to this road long before we left home, having read about it many times. Unfortunately the fog was so thick we never saw the view, and it made us concentrate extremely hard to stay upright on the challenging road. Maybe tomorrow will be better?

Thanks to The Bear's Australian Motorcycle Atlas I had the next day's route all planned. First a run along the Brisbane Valley Highway around Lake Wivenhoe, a quick trip across Mt Glorious and followed by the road up through Dayboro and D'Aguilar. As if this wasn't enough, we then planned to drop down along Peacheater Road thru the fabulous Peacheater Esses then back up along the Old Gympie road into the Blackall Range. This takes in Routes 7, 13, 6, 4 and 11 from the aforementioned Road Atlas. What a ride, knocking off five of the top 100 bike routes in one day. The only problem was it rained all day. It only stopped

for a couple of minutes a couple of times. Welcome to sunny Queensland! We were so tired when we final got to Mapleton that we went to the wrong caravan park. We couldn't work out why we couldn't find the camp kitchen or TV room. Too tired to cook we retired to the local Pub, had a great meal and sat on the wide veranda, in our wet weather jackets, listening to some great acoustic blues. You just can't plan nights like this.

The Blackall range had it all (for us anyway). Firstly, the great bike roads. There is more traffic than we are use too coming from the isolated west coast but also more bends and elevation changes. Then there is the music, lots of great live music in lots of different venues. Jane performed a set, with the resident band, in one of the local restaurants. Of course, they had never heard any of her original songs but they improvised with ease and they all had a great time. We were only just down the road from the site of the famous Woodford Folk Festival, so we started yet another plan to get back for the festival. The third thing we love about the area was the proximity to Mooloolaba, arguably the mecca of yachting in Australia. All of our interests, together in one spot. Oh, don't forget the Swiss bakery at Maleny which provided the icing on the cake.



Glass House Mountains, south of the Blackall Ranges

After the Blackall Ranges we managed to find some little back roads up to Tin Can Bay. Another trip down memory lane as we had stayed here on our yacht in what now feels like a previous life.

Then up to Hervey Bay, where we were a little disappointed. Maybe there is just too much hype about this town. It seemed to have been badly affected by the global economic crisis. We were told its whole economy is based on whale watching, which you can now do everywhere. You couldn't even get a cappuccino along the foreshore in the evening.



What a place to set up camp, Seventeen Seventy

Next was Seventeen Seventy, where we had a great little camp site on the beach. Nice little village but it now has Agnes Water nearby, which just seems like suburbia. It's hard to believe that we had never visited during our grotty yachting life as we spent two wet seasons in nearby Gladstone. Of course our next overnigher was in Gladstone. The caravan park wouldn't allow tents so we took a cabin for one night and did everything we wanted to in one afternoon. So much for our "go slow" approach for this trip. We went to dinner at the yacht club, where we used to be members. Didn't seem to have changed that much, but we



On the road to Finch Hatton Gorge, west of Mackay

thought the meals were better in the old days (starting to sound like our parents).

Next stop Mackay, would you believe it, another caravan park that wouldn't allow tents. I put up a case for staying on the lovely flat green grass. We didn't want power and the grass was the best we had seen in ages. We were promptly told that the grass was nice and green because they didn't allow tents! Feeling like second class citizens, we went in search of another caravan park!

We wanted to see the Victory motorcycles and as there was no dealer in Perth we thought we could see them in Mackay. In 2009, after a weekend in Melbourne, we organised to stay an extra day to go to Victory Motorcycles. Unfortunately they were closed Mondays. The Mackay showroom was closed down and we assumed the global financial crisis had struck again. It wasn't until we had left Mackay that we found out that they had merely moved premises.



View from our Airlie Beach apartment

Next was Airlie Beach. If Mooloolaba is not the yachting mecca, then Airlie Beach is. We booked into a caravan park with a TV room so that we could watch Australia's opening game in the football world cup in South Africa. Only problem was that the TV was on a timer and switched off at ten pm. Of course, this was too early. Many of the campers were European backpackers, all wanted to watch the football and all complained at the office. No way were the rules to be bent. Like us, most got up and left the caravan park. We asked if we

could take a cabin for one night but leave the tent up to move back into the next day. There was plenty of room in the tent area so no one would be put out. They said of course you can but wanted to charge us for a tent site and a cabin. As luck would have it the global economic crises had affected hotel and apartment bookings. We could get a lovely waterfront apartment with marina views, two bathrooms, large balcony and a wide screen TV at less than half price. We decided we were both getting tired and a week of luxury was what we needed. We really enjoyed the football and the rest. We kept bumping into the angry mob of backpackers in town but were careful not to tell them where we were staying, didn't need a crowd around for every game.

After Airlie Beach we continued to head up the coast. By the time we got to Cairns it was school holidays. The caravan parks were packed with kids as well as gray nomads and they were expensive. Once again the hotels were offering cheap deals. We got a serviced twin room in the Golden Chain Motel for \$45 per night. An unpowered tent site was to cost close to \$40 per night. A no brainer! We did some great rides from Cairns up to Port Douglas, Mareeba and Kuranda. We caught up



Jane and Steve, Conway Beach

with old friends and visited some of our favourite spots from our previous visits to Cairns. We had spent a month in Cairns one year while repairing our yachts diesel engine, which had blown a gasket and got seawater in the cylinders. I also spent two weeks holed-up while Jane flew home one time. One time we had also lifted the boat for her annual bottom scrub. So we know

Cairns fairly well. The town had grown since our last visit but still felt much the same.

When time came to leave Cairns we rode the Captain Cook Highway once again. It is often compared to the Great Ocean Road in Victoria. On the cruisers we found it more enjoyable, curves slightly more open, less traffic and higher speed limits. Don't forget the scenery, which is great on both roads.

Then we headed up the inside, sealed, road to Cooktown. What a great road, breathtaking scenery, very few vehicles and the couple of great passes through the ranges of hills keeps it all interesting. Cooktown seemed to have stagnated since we were last there in 1993. We were continually asking ourselves how come nearly twenty years had passed since we last visited far north Queensland. We walked up Mount Cook and were glad we had walked not ridden. The track up the hill was in poor condition and with major infrastructure work up the top, parking was limited on slippery, sloping gravel. Despite the many signs warning no trailers, several four by fours had their trailers in tow. They were complaining and insisting there were no signs. I just muttered "if



Base camp, Mission Beach

they can't see those huge signs how are they ever going to see a motorbike?" Apparently, a couple of days before our visit, a new Harley was dropped while trying to descend from the lookout.



On the road to Cooktown

At Cooktown we had to turn around and “head for home”. We had run out of black stuff and didn't like the idea of taking the cruisers on the gravel. Only about 10,000 km more and we would be home. The first stop on the way home was Atherton. We had decided to stay a few days to enjoy all the tableland roads. Only problem was we had consistent drizzle again. Every time we go near a mountain it starts to rain. After a couple of days of riding in the drizzle, we decided that we would go to the Coffee Works in Mareeba, where for the entry cost you can have as much coffee and handmade chocolate as you can manage. I thought this would be a good deal. At least it would be dry inside. Well half way between Atherton and Mareeba it stopped raining. The local's reckon that happens all the time, the vegetation would indicate that they know what they are taking about. Next trip we will consider Mareeba instead of Atherton as a base. Rain while biking and camping can get a bit tiresome.

Next stop Townsville, for bike servicing and new tyres. Of course, the shop was missing an oil filter (even though we gave lots of notice) so we were delayed a couple of days. Decided to leave on the Thursday but it was raining again. We remembered our “go slow” plan and decided to

stay for the weekend as the V8 supercars were in town for the round the streets race. What a great weekend, no traffic issues, could park the bikes right outside the track gate. We had good racing, got to see some more old timers (INXS) doing their music, managed to pick up some bike merchandising at the discount shop and Craig Lowndes was staying, with his family, in his caravan, at the caravan park. He had a terrible race weekend, so I guess next year he will be on his own, in the team hotel!

We then headed west through Charters Towers into the dinosaur country around Hughenden and Richmond. There is a great dinosaur museum at Richmond. First museum we had visited for a while. For us, there had been too many visits to museums early in the trip. Then continuing west we entered cowboy country. Cloncurry had a resident country singer in the caravan park and the shops were all selling cowboy boots, akubra's and ammo. Jane fell in love with a pair of rhinestone pink heeled boots which would be good for line dancing. Three small problems, Jane doesn't line dance, we couldn't afford them and we had no space on the bikes. That's one of the great things about a bike trip; you can't but lots of useless souvenirs.

Next stop Mount Isa. The road between Cloncurry and Mount Isa had some marvellous bends but also had a radar speed trap. We had not visited Mount Isa before and lots of people told us they had enjoyed it. To us it just seemed like an industrial



Townsville

town trying to make some tourist traps out of nothing. Moving on, we got to the Queensland – Northern Territory border. We had now ridden Jane's Vstar and my Vulcan in all states of Australia. From here we only had 447 kilometres and we could turn left and head south.



Queensland – Northern territory border

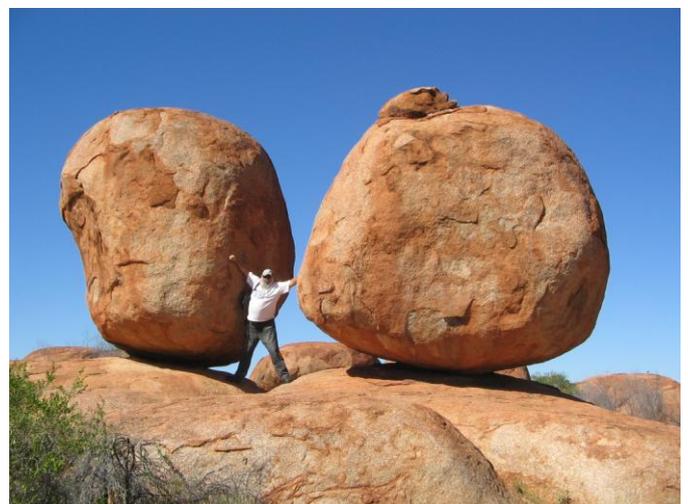
We stayed at Barkly Homestead along with about twenty other bikes that were doing a Townsville to Darwin trip. The only difference was that these bikes were push bikes. Don't fancy that 2,300 kilometre trip by pedal power. Tennant Creek was not an inviting town. We were told that the alcohol ban in the indigenous communities had forced those dependant on the stuff into the towns. The bureaucrats appear to be just moving the problem from one place to another. We stopped at the Devils Marbles and the buses quickly made us realise we were back in tourist territory. We stayed at Wycliffe Well, apparently lots on extra

terrestrials also visit the well. We didn't meet any but we did catch up with a German couple doing the Adelaide - Darwin run on a couple of hired DR650 Suzuki's.

Next stop Alice Springs. They had just broken the record for the coldest maximum temperature ever.

It was 6 degrees. Lots of rain had left the Todd River flowing and the dry river regatta had to be cancelled. We had to wait a couple of days before going to the West MacDonald Range to allow the water to subside over the flood ways. It was worth the wait. The Desert Park was also a nice spot and very informative. We also attended the local Ulysses branch meeting, where we were made very welcome.

It continued to be cold and the shops had sold out of heaters. We both purchased some silk thermal glove liners. Cost their weight in gold, but were worth it. We had to show our id's to get some beer, not because we were looking so trim, fit and young that we had to prove our age, but because there are purchase limits in town and all id's are scanned and stored centrally to control the sale of alcohol. You can't buy spirits during the day and one European backpacker was causing quite a scene trying to get a bottle. The queues outside the bottle shops prior to opening are really alarming.



Steve playing with his marbles



Sunset at Kings Canyon

After The Alice we headed to Kings Canyon. We absolutely loved the National Park and the walk around the canyon ridge is spectacular. Well worth all the steps up the first climb. The dingos around the camp site were a nuisance, one actually walked inside our annex! Every time we tried to eat they would appear begging for food. The camp site has a sunset viewing area and it's certainly there for a valid reason.

Next stop Yulara with Uluru (Ayers Rock) and Kata Tjuia (The Olgas). We had never been to the rock before. We tried once, back in the eighties, but our old Kombi did a valve going across the Nullarbor and we decided to travel the east coast where help was more readily available if required. Even though the locals don't want people climbing



The Rock always seems to be closed.

the rock, it is still open and we had wanted to climb it since we were young. It would be difficult not to climb it after such a long ride to get here. The decision was taken out of our hands since every day we were there it was closed. Too hot, too windy, too wet.



Wish the sun would come out

Recently a stupid French stripper, Alizee Sery, caused outrage in Australia by getting her kit off on top of Uluru. Sery says she did it as a tribute to the Aboriginal people. "What we need to remember is that traditionally, the Aboriginal people were living naked, so stripping down was a return to what it was like," she told Australian reporters. "I do not mean in any way for this video to offend the Aboriginal culture." Hope she enjoyed her five minutes of fame; she certainly caused a lot of damage by her selfish actions. We think it would be best just to close the rock. Anyway we walked around the base and visited



The Olgas

the interpretation centre. Overall it is just a money making tourist place and there are many other places within Australia that demand a return visit before another visit to the rock. We much preferred The Olgas, some really nice walking and a much more peaceful vibe.

Once we left the rock we really did feel like we were heading home. The sign at The Olgas read 259 to WA border. Unfortunately this is a gravel road and we wanted to stay on the bitumen. For us it was 2300 kilometres to the WA border, nearly ten times the distance. There was really only one more place left to stop, Coober Pedy; the opal mining town where the majority of the population live in the dugouts; bored out of the soft rock.



Dugout, Coober Pedy

Many of these underground houses are large and opulent. There are many shops and even a hotel underground. All the shops sell opals, many “direct” from the miners. All quote that their opals are the best quality and beware of others. You would want to know what you were buying.

From Coober Pedy it was one nighters all the way home. It was now the first week of August and we always knew we could cop a hiding coming back across the Nullarbor in winter. For once we struck it lucky. The forecast was for several days of fine weather. Of course, this also meant cold weather. Overnight we had one or two degrees with maximums in the mid-teens. You soon learn that riding



No distances on this sign in Port Augusta, but Perth is 2,400 kilometres and Darwin 2750 kilometres

non-stop on an empty outback highway is much colder than riding around the city. We would have liked a set of traffic lights on red so we had an excuse to stop and warm up for a minute or two.

We stopped at Port Augusta, Ceduna, Eucla and Norseman; arriving home in five days from Coober Pedy. We travelled three thousand kilometres in five days, not bad since we were only a month from the shortest day and we never rode at night. Note to self: *get heated grips for the next big adventure.*



West MacDonald Ranges